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consumer good overproduction, and sovereign states competing, in mimetic or not-so-mimetic violence, for places beyond their own borders where they can exploit more natural resources or grab uncontested space to dump their toxic waste? The journey through *Entanglements* may lead readers to end up, in some way or another, like Pi: in perplexity. This book does not belong to the kind of cuddly, faithful, knowledge-delivering domestic companion; rather, it is a stern reminder about the loneliness of those cultural workers and their spectators/readers who never chose the foundations of our – in so many ways – dehumanizing, unsustainable way of life, nor ever understood how to escape from it. Somewhere along the road, Pi and Richard Parker must have swapped positions.

Andrea Riemenschnitter

DENECKE, Wiebke: *The Dynamics of Masters Literature: Early Chinese Thought from Confucius to Han Feizi*, Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London: Harvard University Press, 2010. viii, 370 pp. ISBN 978-0-674-05609-1.

Many scholars have voiced their concerns about how contemporary philosophical engagement with early Chinese thought falls short due to a resilient and mistaken reliance on the vocabulary of "Western philosophy". The declared aim then is usually to understand these texts on their own terms, which, of course, is rather quixotic to the extent that such an attempt relies on translation, too, and thus on a more than likely departure from the terms that one initially sets out to understand. Aware of this hermeneutical quandary, some scholars turn to the vocabulary of what they conceive as less dominant strands within "Western philosophy", thus altering the line of criticism of contemporary philosophical engagement with early Chinese thought: it is no longer the vocabulary of "Western philosophy" per se that is considered inadequate, but some parts are found more (in)adequate than others (say, Dewey, Heidegger, Levinas or Derrida are for some reason often found more adequate than Plato, Aristotle or all of analytic philosophy). Other scholars embark on a more radical course trying to dispense with philosophical vocabulary altogether and stay uncommitted to any and all disciplinary boundaries. It is in this broader context of (philosophical) historiography that Wiebke Denecke's book on Masters Literature finds its place; for hers is an explicit attempt to frame the "inquiry into this text corpus through the lens of other disciplines, questions, and concerns for our time", i.e. decidedly not through the lens of a "Chinese philosophy" fashioned in the image

of "Western philosophy" (p. 3). Viewed from this perspective, Denecke's book stands out as a fresh and challenging contribution to the many, more conventional and well-established discussions of early "Chinese philosophy".

The book is clearly structured. In the introduction, Denecke states her case against efforts at understanding early Chinese thought in terms of "Chinese philosophy", which she in turn understands and presents as largely a European, i.e. Jesuit, invention. Here, as well as in her discussion of late 19th and early 20th century Japanese and Chinese sources regarding the emergence of *zhexue* as translational term for philosophy, Denecke dexterously inserts quotes from contemporary sceptics that corroborate her argument, as when she turns to Johann Jakob Bruckner's suspicion about Chinese texts being at the hands of the Jesuits disfigured into "a coherent, systematic philosophy" (p. 7) or when she discusses the self-conscious familiarization of the continuingly foreign term philosophy in Xie Wuliang's *History of Chinese Philosophy* (1915). Denecke introduces her own approach as "immanent historicist" (p. 22), which takes its starting-point with the first identification of the text corpus from within "the Chinese tradition" in the Han Dynasty (206 AD–220 BC) as *zhuzi baijia* or, in short, *zi*, "Masters Texts". She is, of course, aware that this way of approaching the subject-matter and any effort at contextualizing "the masters" is also "anachronistic", since most evidence stems from Han times, when most of the texts under question underwent considerable editing or eventually came into being (p. 23). Having issued all these disclaimers, Denecke feels nonetheless free to rely on the texts themselves. In an important paragraph, she writes:

> Although a lack of contemporary sources prevents us from giving a full-fledged historically contextualized reading of the Masters Texts, the texts themselves and their mutual references to each other provide ample context for their historical understanding. Their fierce attacks on opponents and their clever strategies to entice their audience in their own favour constitute a discursive space of shared words and concepts, dissonant interpretations, and disputed implementations. We are thus granted a most intimate view of the internal historical development of the genre of "Masters Literature" through the rhetorical maneuvers of the authors themselves (p. 24).

Denecke's study is "yet another examination of the Masters Texts", as she admits, but it is supposed to be like no other examination insofar as her study proposes and conducts a "new disciplinary 'translation'" (p. 28), that is a discipline, for which she "coins" the term "Masters Literature".

Explicitly acknowledging her anachronistic perspective, Denecke devotes the entire first chapter to investigate different "faces" of Masters Literature from across its development as a textual genre in the Han dynasty. The first face is gleaned from the polemics against other "masters" as presented in the texts themselves, that is, from the genre's alleged birth in the *Mozi*'s *Fei ru* chapter ("Against Confucians") and its "creation of a generic disciple" to be "torn down with disputative clamor" (p. 36) to Mencius's more subtle and gentle strategy of engaging the other "masters" in dialogue and reining them in by an effort at persuasion modelled on the *Lunyu*'s "scene of instruction" (p. 36), to Xunzi's "panoramic view of different master figures and schools of thought" (p. 45) in his *Fei shi'er zi* chapter ("Against the Twelve Masters"), and finally to the *Zhuangzi*'s all-subsuming "generic portrayals" (p. 52), in which the partiality of each "master's" view is consequently and most elegantly followed through when Zhuangzi himself is included as one of them. The second face shows in Han dynasty taxonomies (Liu Xiang's *Bielu*, Sima Tan's *Yaozhi*) and particularly in the *Hanshu*'s "Bibliographical Treatise" (*Yiwenzhi*), all of which eventually led to the fourfold categorization of traditional Chinese bibliography as *jing* ("Classics"), *zi* ("Masters"), *shi* ("Histories") and *ji* ("Literary Collections"). Denecke's main point here is to illustrate how "a few more parameters" are added "to the discursive machine" and how the Masters Texts assume a new "position in a hierarchical chronology" (the rise of the "Masters" and the closure of the "Classics") beyond its particularity as a textual genre (p. 59). The third face is presented by the records of clans and biographies of pre-Qin "masters" and their "disciples" in Sima Qian's *Shiji* (Records of the Grand Historian). Denecke argues that Sima Qian understood the "masters" primarily as authors (whose writings he seeks to compare to their lives) and that he distinguished between a Confucian emphasis on speech or persuasion and an emphasis on writing shared by a "*Laozi* lineage" that includes, of course, Zhuangzi, but also Han Feizi. The biographies of Mencius and Xunzi do not exhibit any such emphasis, but are rather held together by the "physical, geographical proximity" (p. 73) of the Jixia Academy. In short: Sima Qian's "master line-up thus cuts across almost all boundaries of the taxonomy of [Sima Tan's] 'Six Schools'" (p. 75). The fourth face, finally, is shown by Wang Chong, who no longer understands the "Masters" as a "necessary supplement to the Classics", as the *Yiwenzhi* put it, but claims them to be "actually the more reliable guide to the past" complementing "the deficient Classics" (p. 79). With Wang Chong, the development of Masters Texts in the Han reaches a climax, since he perceives

them as "a protected space for creative thinking that contrasts with the dullness of commentarial scholarship" (pp. 86–87).

At this juncture, i.e. almost ninety pages into the book, Denecke inserts a two page outlook of what is to follow (as she does at the ends of all ensuing chapters, navigating the reader through her text), and, importantly, what exact character the next seven chapters have, what precise contribution to scholarly literature Denecke intends to make. This passage deserves to be quoted in full:

> In accordance with my definition of the Masters genre as a discursive space, the seven chapters that follow revisit well-known passages from the most prominent texts in the corpus of Masters Literature. We will proceed at the slow pace of a Saturday afternoon stroll. My close readings are not intended to compete with the host of illuminating interpretations of these texts over the centuries. They only claim to be consistent in asking the question of how particular Masters Texts contributed to shaping and actively transforming the discursive space of Masters Literature from the fifth to the second centuries BCE. The main goal of this book will have been achieved if the ensuing chapters on the *Analects*, *Mozi*, *Mencius*, *Xunzi*, *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, and *Han Feizi* succeed in convincing the reader of the value of exploring how these texts shared the expansive and dramatic discursive terrain they created (p. 89).

Denecke makes a number of important points in this passage (unlike her truistic point that "the texts shared the discursive terrain they created": if they indeed created that terrain, then they certainly shared it). She qualifies her approach to these texts as amounting to "close readings" consistently asking the question that she is interested in, and she distances herself from any attempt to "compete with the host of illuminating interpretations of these texts over the centuries". There is much truth to this. Denecke's ensuing chapters read like a collection of personal notes drawing on the licence that she grants herself in the above passage when exempting her own reading from all competition with other interpretations. Given that Denecke's text focuses on rhetorical strategies as much as it does, it might be fair to wonder how much her own disclaimer has itself to be understood as a matter of rhetoric. In some places, she seems to advance claims that are stronger than what her rhetoric here suggests and that are clearly directed against interpretations by others. Surely, her overall claim of "a common discursive space of contention" serving as "strongest proof for the existence of a distinct textual genre of Masters Literature in pre-Qin times" (p. 89) uses a vocabulary at odds with the issued disclaimer. At this point, all worries of anachronism seem dissipated.

Be that as it may, Denecke's close readings often bear the character of, as I already noted, out-of-competition personal notes. In some sense, they are even experimental, teasing out what may be gleaned from reading these texts coherently for their discursive moves and rhetorical strategies in view of other "masters". As is to be expected, the result of such an approach is a mixed bag, in which the productiveness of Denecke's licence and original approach also occasionally misfires and then comes to illustrate the problems of foregrounding and strictly adhering to any one approach only. Yet, it should be mentioned that, throughout, the text is well and appealingly written and that there are plenty of interesting aspects Denecke succeeds in bringing to the reader's attention. For lack of space, I confine myself to one example only.

In her discussion of the *Analects*, she includes an analysis of the opening sequence (1:1–1:8) as an example of how carefully the compilers of the text had arranged the episodes "based on thematic, rhetorical, and stylistic considerations" (p. 104). Although Denecke's sequential reading is certainly tailored to bring out the thematic priority that she had already established before her analysis (i.e. the sense of an alternative community, cf. pp. 99–103), her point against the prevailing synoptic readings, "done when trying to construct a 'Confucian philosophy' by assembling passages discussing such key terms as 'benevolence' or 'ritual propriety' out of context and trying to arrive at a sort of strict definition of the terms" (p. 109) is well taken. To bring the point home, however, she would have to offer a better argument than simply charging others (and here, she is clearly stepping into competition with some "illuminating interpretations of these texts over the centuries") of reading the texts "out of context" – she herself seems to be making a case for taking these texts as constituting a meaningful interpretative "context". What is more, it seems typical for Denecke that, having argued for the importance of sequential reading as such, she then feels free to abstain from any further sequential reading throughout the entire book.

The book ends with a comparatively short epilogue, which is entitled "A Future for Masters Literature and Chinese Philosophy". Indeed, for those who have read the introduction, the resurfacing of "Chinese Philosophy" at the end of Denecke's book might come as a surprise. Has "Chinese Philosophy" according to her not been invented in Jesuit Europe and subsequently been further contaminated by Western philosophical vocabulary to the point that she posited the need for a new disciplinary translation of the textual corpus hitherto labelled early "Chinese Philosophy"? In the epilogue, it becomes clear that Denecke means to

"stick to the concept of 'Chinese Philosophy' as heuristic purpose, not as ontological claim" and that she believes "the label can do terrific work for us" (p. 338). Of course, by "Chinese Philosophy" she now no longer means the one cast in the vocabulary of "Western Philosophy" and also not one that seeks to improve on "Western philosophy". In Denecke's scheme, "Chinese Philosophy" ends up being "just one among many past and current disciplinary translations brought to bear on early Chinese Masters Texts" (among other such translations that she discusses are e.g. "belles lettres" and "intellectual history"). The concept of philosophy informing Denecke's "Chinese Philosophy" of the future turns out to be explicitly indebted to Jacques Derrida (emphasizing the generative power of non-Western languages) and Ian Hacking (emphasizing "styles of reasoning"), and one may rightly wonder why Denecke finds these vocabularies less likely to distort early Chinese thought than Plato, Aristotle or analytic philosophy. At the very end of her book, she writes that "when considering the Masters Texts as a treasure trove of 'styles of reasoning' with philosophically productive potential, we would be far removed from imposing judgmental equivalences of Western concepts onto Chinese thought traditions" (p. 345), but that seems simply to beg the question, since what is "philosophically productive" is precisely that which Derrida, Hacking and most other philosophers (including analytic philosophers) would disagree about.

Denecke apparently thinks of "styles of reasoning" as a universal category in much the same sense she rejects for a reading of "Chinese philosophy" in the image of "Western philosophy". "Styles of reasoning", she writes, "come and go", and the Masters Texts or passages therein "clearly qualify as a peculiar 'style of reasoning'" (p. 345). In quite a similar vein, one could be very critical of Denecke's castigation of Western philosophical vocabulary in light of her own occasional usage of such vocabulary ("maieutic", p. 37; "pastoral", p. 41; "an Epicurean sense", p. 101; "Socratic acknowledgement", p. 111; "Derridean", p. 325, etc.) and her own strong reliance on technical vocabulary taken from classical rhetoric, which it seems would equally qualify as "Western" ("*ad hominem* move", p. 35; "the analeptic flow of argument", p. 43; *longitas* vs. *brevitas*, p. 130; "argues *ad auctoritatem*", p. 141; "arguments *ad peiorem* rather than *ad absurdum*", p. 143; *polyptoton*, p. 149; etc.). If that were all that there is to Denecke's intervention, then much of it would seem to be contradictory, and I would have to end this review by voicing serious misgivings.

Denecke's textual approach is not only focussing on rhetorical strategies. Arguably, she is very much pursuing a rhetorical strategy herself. This would explain some possible major contradictions in her book, e.g. concerning her con-

scious embrace of Masters Texts as a textual genre from an anachronistic Han perspective and her claiming no less than the existence of that textual genre in pre-Qin times, or the discrepancy between the introduction and the epilogue in terms of the uselessness/usefulness of the label "Chinese Philosophy". When she ends her book musing about the "literary colonization of intellectual history", the "intellectual colonization of literary studies", the "historical colonization of philosophy" and the "intellectual decolonization of Western philosophy", it becomes clear that Denecke is not intent on conducting a sinological study of early Chinese thought, but aims at generating a "revisionist momentum" (p. 22), which, she believes, a disciplinary translation of that textual corpus into "belles lettres" cannot bring about. Hence, hiding behind her personal notes lurks an aim that amounts to an intervention of multitudinous consequence, a major re-shuffling of disciplinary boundaries and taxonomies. Her last sentence of the book, highlighting "the inevitable, irreversible confluence with other thought traditions of the world that we have the privilege to witness in our lifetime", suggests, to me, that this reshuffling would have "Western philosophy" emerge in a shape that no longer calls for the qualification of that philosophy as "Western" – not because it appears pleonastic, but because it is found to be no longer useful to qualify philosophy in such terms.

It is evident that such an intervention will be viewed critically by the established disciplines and that Denecke's book will perhaps be found deficient, say, from the perspective of the well-trained professional sinologist. But – if I do not entirely misunderstand Denecke's intentions, and at the risk of giving her book a reading a bit on the charitable side – when faced with such criticism formulated on the basis of traditional disciplinary conventions such as the philosopher's unease with possible contradiction, it seems to me that Denecke would want to respond in the vein of the visionary spirit of Walt Whitman's beautiful lines in his *Leaves of Grass*: "Do I contradict myself? Very well … then I contradict myself; I am large … I contain multitudes."

Ralph Weber